

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4565

C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAHRAN 0049

STADIS////////////////////////////////////

DEPT PASS BEIRUT, ABU DHABI, KUWAIT AND JIDDA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAIR, SA, ASAF

SUBJECT: CIVAIR: MEA FLT 432 ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

REF: DHAHRAN 0009, JIDDA 0012

1. NATIONAL TRANSPORT SAFETY BOARD INVESTIGATORS AND BOEING EXPERT, WHO RETURNED AFTERNOON JANUARY 11 FROM SITE OF MEA AIR CRASH (SEE REFTELS) WERE DEBRIEFED BY CONSUL GENERAL. THEY MADE FOLLOWING POINTS:

2. ALL INVESTIGATORS COMPLETELY SATISFIED THAT STRUCTURAL FAILURE OF AIRCRAFT DID NOT CAUSE MEA AIRCRAFT TO CRASH. THEY HAVE "CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE (AIRCRAFT) BROKE UP IN THE AIR" AT 37,000 FEET AS IT WAS "FLYING ALONG". ONLY DETERMINATION THEY PREPARED TO MAKE FOR NOW IS THAT "VIOLENT ACTION IN THE AIR CAUSED PARTS (OF AIRCRAFT) TO SEPARATE."

3. PRIVATELY, WHILE AWAITING RESULTS OF LAB TESTS, INVESTIGATORS SPECULATE THAT EXPLOSIVE DEVICE BLEW UP 180-INCH-LONG SECTION STRETCHING FROM COCKPIT INTO FIRST CLASS COMPARTMENT OF AIRCRAFT. UNLIKE OTHER SECTIONS OF AIRCRAFT, WHICH REACHED GROUND AS SEPARATE COMPONENTS, THAT SECTION WAS FOUND BROKEN INTO TWISTED PARTS SMALLER THAN DESK TOP. THEY WERE ABLE TO RECOVER 90 PERCENT OF METAL FROM THAT SECTION AS WELL AS PIECE OF CARPETING WHICH CONTAINED "SHREDDED BITS OF METAL IMBEDDED" INTO FABRIC. THEY JUDGE METAL FRAGMENTS TO

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HAVE BEEN FORCED UP INTO CARPETING FROM LUGGAGE COMPARTMENT. HIGHLY-

REGARDED BRITISH EXPLOSIVES EXPERT BROUGHT IN TO PARTICIPATE IN INVESTIGATION AND IT IS HOPE OF US INVESTIGATORS THAT HE WILL MAKE LAB ANALYSIS OF METAL FRAGMENTS AND SMALL BITS OF BURNT FABRIC COLLECTED AT CRASH SITE. AT THIS POINT BRITISH EXPERT NONCOMMITTAL, PENDING RESULTS OF LAB WORK, AS TO CAUSE OF AIRCRAFT BUT HE TOO HAS EXPRESSED HIS OPINION CRASH NOT CAUSED BY AIR FRAME FAILURE.

4. INVESTIGATORS CONSIDERED REPORTS THAT ONLY 81 BODIES FOUND IN WRECKAGE AS AGAINST 82 NAMES ON MANIFEST. THEY POINT OUT THAT DISMEMBERED REMAINS OF PASSENGERS COULD HAVE BEEN BAGGED INCORRECTLY AND, THEREFORE, THAT COULD ACCOUNT FOR MISSING PASSENGER. THEY ALSO REVIEWED REPORTS THAT ONE PASSENGER FAILED TO BOARD AIRCRAFT IN BEIRUT ALTHOUGH HE WAS ISSUED BOARDING PASS. WHILE THAT LINE OF INVESTIGATION WORTH PURSUING THEY DOUBT IT WILL LEAD ANYWHERE. MEA FLIGHT WAS DELAYED FOR SEVERAL HOURS ON GROUND BEFORE TAKE OFF, AND, THEREFORE, ANY TIMING DEVICE IN LUGGAGE WOULD HAVE BEEN TRIGGERED BEFORE TAKEOFF. THUS IF EXPLOSIVES WERE DETONATED BY DEVICE, IT WOULD HAVE HAD TO HAVE BEEN A VERY SOPHISTICATED ONE REQUIRING MECHANISM THAT WAS ALTITUDE SENSITIVE WHICH, IN TURN, WOULD HAVE SET OFF TIMING DEVICE. INVESTIGATORS ALSO CONSIDERED, AND REJECTED, HYPOTHESIS THAT CRASH CAUSED BY AIRCRAFT RUNNING OUT OF FUEL.
BUSHNELL

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED ABOVE ADDRESSEES.

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